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ABSTRACT

This study reflects on children's voices when they are motivated, engaged, and learning in school. It consists of hearing what they have to say about what works for them and their positive school experiences rather than those told by adults. Adults who make policy are missing important information about the student curriculum they write. They are missing practices that help students learn best, and about how to deliver those practices. Through children's voices, educators can hear how they could fill in this missing information and become more effective in their work. To gain this missing piece, student voice, students from elementary, middle, and high schools were interviewed individually or in focus groups. The report argues that it is time adults listened, heard, and acted on these student voices to transform schools into positive environments in which children learn and thrive in academic success. An appendix contains interview questions. (Contains 26 references and 10 figures.) (DFR)

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Students' Voices About Schooling: What Works for Them Its Implications to School Reform

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Students' Voices About Schooling: What Works for Them
Its Implications to School Reform

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The purpose of this study was to reflect on children's voices. To talk, listen and hear what students are saying about their perceptions of what is happening when they are motivated, engaged and learning in school. To hear what they had to say about what works for them and their positive school experiences rather than those told by adults. Adults who make policy are missing important information about student curriculum they write; about practices that help students learn best; and about how to deliver those practices. It was hoped that through children's voices educators would hear how they could fill in this missing information and become more effective in their work. To gain this missing piece, student voice, students from elementary, middle and high schools were interviewed individually or in focus groups. It is hoped that these student voices can better inform the adults who go about doing their "business" in the running of schools and classrooms. The authors feel that it is time the adults listened, heard and acted on these student voices in order to transform schools into positive environments in which children learn and thrive in academic success. The ultimate purpose then is to help transform schools to make them a better place for students and adults.

Why Student Voice?

Universal opinion asserts that our schools are not succeeding with too many children. Children are dropping out of school at alarming rates, the number of children not learning to read is at crisis and the number of students that are not involved in changing schools is a tragedy. It is clear to us that student voice is the missing piece, so often left out, in school transformation. Even though, "...They [students] are in a very real sense, the primary stakeholders in their own learning process we do not necessarily listen to them" (Lincoln 1995). When decisions are carried out in classrooms the only voices that are heard or listened to are adults, yet, it is the student who experiences what we adults view as the way to do business - the curriculum, the pedagogy, the programs, the stuff of our schools and classrooms. Educators continue doing this even though some basic premises of teaching are to know your students, engage, challenge and empower them in their own learning. Yet, we do not really talk to or listen to them so that we can become more effective in assuring these principles. We continue leaving out the most important person in our educational system, our children (Leatt, 1988). We do this even when we know that when students who do not feel a part of the school community, become disengaged and ultimately a burden to society (Oldfather, 1991). Engaged, children, Johnson (1994) points out, insure that schools become more effective in teaching children.

In addition, much research has been done on human motivation but the results are often ignored. Oldfather (1995) says, "... School environment should provide a curriculum that is interesting, challenging, integrated, highly engaging and structured for student choices. Schools provide the opposite. Instead, ... [School] environments focus on the teacher, use single task formats, promote conformity, foster competition, use external performance based rewards, and provide feedback in controlling, rather than informational ways."

It is time and it makes sense to listen to student voice. "If school is about what students know, value and care about, we need to know who students really are. We need to listen to

them, pay attention to what they show us about themselves and their views, and build a classroom world that support and teach in light of those insights. Students' voices help us understand what they need and value as learners." (Dahl 1995). To support this notion, Delpitt (1988, page 297) says, "You have to know the kids. They teach me how to teach them. They may be from all kinds of background and cultures, but if you really listen to them they'll tell you how to teach them."

Here are the words of a powerful student voice that clearly illustrates why we have to hear what students are saying. Alissa is a 12th grader. She says,

> *"...This school...it's like a city -. the government has too much power, and the community doesn't have enough say so. Or you know, when we're talking, its just like we're talking to hear ourselves talk, there's not nobody listening. But, I mean, it could be a good city"* (Thorson, S. (Unpublished, untitled manuscript.).

The voices represented in our study's findings will help to inform the practice of current and future classroom teachers and administrators. The most overarching impact is to society, by using student voice in the transformation process, schools will improve and student achievement will increase. By listening to students' voices we will add new and valuable wisdom to the preparation of teachers in our teacher preparation program and to future and current administrators in our leadership program.

It is clear that society is affected by the lack of adults listening and hearing student voices, the voices for which school should be all about. It is time to practice what we preach b·· listening, instead of talking, so that we can hear student voices. Listening to the voices of ou children can result in a paradigm shift so that schools become a better place for all students.

Resiliency and School Success

In the 90's there was not much positive press coming from educational institutions. Television and news was constantly talking about what schools were not doing for our children. Teachers were teaching in settings where children came to them with a myriad of risk factors leading to discouragement and lack of support. Teachers were facing students who won't learn. It is often assumed that students having these risky behaviors are doomed and will be part of society's problem rather than a solution. Schools and students alike need to look at more positive answers to their survivals. There is a great amount of research showing us that it is deleterious to run negative programs in schools whereby students are labeled and tracked. When in this situation, students are not motivated to change to a more positive, less risky behavior (Benard 1993). Indeed, why should they, when adults show little to no faith in them? Understanding resiliency factors can be the answer. (Benard 1991), in her resiliency research, concludes that everyone has the capacity to be resilient in the utmost of dysfunctional situations. Schools need to start looking at students strengths with the same vigor they have always uncovered student weaknesses and problems. "Schools can use the resiliency paradigm as a comprehensive model for developing academic and social success for all students and an empowered, motivated staff able to met the challenges of education today" (Henderson and Milstein, (1996),point out that the literature is clear that students strengths can release them from their risky behavior to a more resilient one.

Therefore, what can the schools do to help modify risky behavior? An analysis of the literature leads to resilient factors that have been shown to make a difference. Hawkins, Catalano and Miller (1992) concluded that the literature suggest that three main strategies exist to mitigate the impact of risk student behavior. All three of these strategies are obtainable in schools: 1) Increase connections between an individual and any pro-social person such as a teacher; 2) set clear and consistent boundaries and 3) teach life skills such as cooperation, problem solving and decision-making and communication. Wolin and Wolin (1993) points out that it takes only one

individual resiliency trait to help overcome the negative odds in life. That trait is the capacity for and connection to learning. Bad schools don't help children make those connections. Schools aware of resiliency factors can make a difference. Other traits are suggested by Henderson and Milstein (1996) who summarized resiliency factors found in the literature. discuss promoting close bonds, protect factors that value and encourage education, expresses high and realistic expectations for success, encourages goal setting and sets and enforces clear boundaries. Which are traits that schools deal with every day. What are student voices saying about their resilient factors?

Teaching and Learning

It is well known that the strategies and techniques used in classrooms of the 21st century have had a paradigm shift. This shift has gone away from the traditional teacher centered classroom of emphasizing dittos and worksheets, a reliance on textbooks and one in which students are primarily passive learners(Goodland1984, Ben-Peretz 1990). Brooks and Brooks (1993) state that traditional teachers devalue student opinion. They go on to say, "When asking students questions, most teachers seek not to enable students to think through intricate issues, but to discover whether students know the 'right' answers" Jackson (1986) contends that students merely mimic newly presented information on quizzes and tests. Testing in this way does not allow students to apply skills and knowledge nor does it promote higher-order thinking (Resnick 1987). The proponents of alternative assessment recognize that traditional formatted tests with multiple choice, true and false and fill-in questions are based on student recall and only mimic information given to them by teachers. Alternative assessment, on the other hand provides opportunities for students to understand knowledge at a deeper level and how to use it. . It's about making connections, gaining skills in problem solving and inquiry processes. Alternative assessment should be an ongoing process that drives learning in the classroom.

The paradigm today speaks of a shift toward constructivism, a different kind of learning in which teaching emphasizes a student centered classroom where students are doing inquiry, learning high level thinking, problem solving and are learning about real life. In this new paradigm student disinterest relies on how they are being taught rather than through the fault of the subject. Duckworth (1993) points out, " I propose situations for people to think about and I watch what they do. They tell me what *they* make of it rather than my telling them *what* to make of it." In this new paradigm student ideas are viewed as important with the recognition that they are thinkers.

In constructivist classrooms one would expect to see students being challenged, working in groups, making connections and reaching conclusions in relevant and interesting ways. Wolk (1994) states, "When children are free to choose their own projects, integrating knowledge as the need arises, motivation-and success-follow naturally." Inner city school teachers battle the cry of the fact that their students can't read and have such low skills can accomplish nothing. Hartman, DeCicco and Griffen (1994) disagree with this idea. They say, "Given a chance to make choices to apply what they've learned in projects that interest them, inner city students value what they achieve through inquiry learning." In this study, students perceptions were sought to bring credence and reality to this new paradigm. Are students experiencing these new philosophies or are they meshed in traditional models of teaching and learning?

Researchers, Baum, Renzulli and Hebert (1994) identified several understandings for underachievement, emotional issues, peer group pressure, the lack of appropriate curriculum, undiagnosed learning disabilities and poor learning strategies. The successful approaches tended to center on students, accentuate students' strengths and value their interests and assist them in developing creative projects. In their study, they found that these strategies helped to reverse the cycle of underachievement. Similar to the resiliency research, "when students received positive achievement from a caring adult, achievement improved." As skill and competence developed, students gained considerable attention from a new peer group, who valued academic

achievement. All students began to experience success when encouraged to pursue an area of interest in their preferred learning style. The researchers observed that "many students exhibit behavior problems in the classroom simply because of unchallenging curriculum." Several other studies (Baum, et. al. 1998, Baum and Owens 1988, Emerick 1992, Whitmore 1980) that have examined the curricular approaches that are effective with underachievers, confirmed this by finding, "completing meaningful projects increases self-esteem, academic self-efficacy, and overall motivation." Likewise, research on high-ability students in general confirms the benefits of these approaches for them as well.

The important role of the teacher gives us important knowledge to understand more fully the voices of students about their teacher's behaviors that they find helpful. Leinhardt (1992) describes the role of teacher as "that of a highly knowledgeable member of the community - a guide, not simply an interactive textbook. Teachers and students together track the progress of the group's understanding (meta-knowledge); accept or refute proposed interpretations of others (background factual knowledge); propose interpretations of their own (reasoning); and both increases the demand task and reduce difficulty by sharing it."

Forms of groupwork are pedagogical strategies often used by teachers. They are sometimes touted as important for organizing classroom environments and for increasing student participation and learning. They are also viewed as unsuccessful for teaching and learning. Furtwengler (1992) asserts that the research reveals that Cooperative Learning improves students' academic achievement and social skills, and that it is a popular style with students. She helps us to understand the numerous program designs for cooperative learning that exist in various subject areas and types of classrooms, an alphabet soup of acronyms: STAD, TGT, TAI, CIRC.

Cohen and Lotan (1997), veteran researchers of Complex Instruction, help us to navigate through this conundrum of informal groupwork, cooperative learning and complex instruction. Their research was designed to "develop a workable and equitable approach to instruction, one that reaches all children...Especially to (discover) a solution to the problem of unequal status in heterogeneous classrooms: those without ability grouping; those that are bilingual, multilingual, or desegregated; and those in untracked middle and secondary school." Complex Instruction is very different from Cooperative Learning and informal groupwork techniques. Cohen cautions that, "small cooperative groups increases friendliness and trust among students from diverse ethnic, linguistic, and racial backgrounds. However, teachers find the use of groupwork a difficult strategy to manage. They worry about loss of control; they also are concerned with the failure of some students to participate while others do all the work. Parents of high achievers complain that their children are held back by the group and that they are working and "unpaid teaching assistants."

Lotan summarized the "robust findings of the research on complex instruction is the positive relationship between student interaction in small groups and average learning gains." There are three features of complex instruction: how to organize the classroom for productive groupwork, how to assign learning tasks that are true group tasks, and how to equalize participation of students of different status in the small group. Cohen identifies the bottom line difference between complex instruction and other forms of groupwork, "Groupwork in complex instruction addresses these issues (teacher concerns) with intellectually demanding curricula and with extensive staff development for teachers." Lotan clarifies this by identifying additional characteristics: delegation of authority, allowing students to serve as academic, linguistic and intellectual resources for one another, students conducting constructive conversations and assuming specific procedural roles.

Because of the popularity of this strategy and the documented gains of complex instruction, we wanted to understand how students perceive groupwork. Anticipating that they would enjoy it, teachers might be motivated to increase their knowledge and skill of the formal approaches to groupwork and thus increase their use, effectiveness and benefit to students.

Research Methods

Instrument Design

There were a total of 32 interview questions (See Appendix A). The questions were divided into four parts: demographics, student profile, academic factors, and emotional (resiliency) factors. The demographics included the number of years the student was enrolled in the school as well as the basic information of age, grade level, gender and ethnicity. Student profile questions determined the student's perception of their academic success and their career goals. The academic questions explored children's perceptions of their learning, what teachers did to help them learn and circumstances that helped them know when they were learning. Since resiliency factors are inherent in student success and it is an issue that is not basic to school discussions and problem solving, student experiences with resiliency factors made up an important part of the interview questions. Students were asked about what was happening in their lives that led to their feeling of success. Understanding resiliency can be a positive model for developing schools, which empower children to succeed (Henderson and Milstein, 1996).

Participants

The study consisted of 27 individual student interviews and 38 focus group participants in grades 4,5,6, 8 10 and 12, for a total of 68 participants. All sessions were audiotaped and transcribed. This preliminary study consists of the 27 individual student interviews. A second, final paper will include all 68 participants.

Names were not used in the analysis nor was the school given any information about specific student comments. Participants were 4th and 5th grade students enrolled in Hayward Unified School District in Hayward California, 6th and 8th grade students from Oakland Unified School District in Oakland, California and 10th and 12th grade students from San Mateo Union School District in San Mateo, California. Four to five students from each grade level were individually interviewed and from four to nine students in each focus group at each grade level. Students from different academic achievement levels, including special education, also participated.

Figure 1
Participants by Grade Level

	Hayward		Oakland		San Mateo		Total
	4th	5th	6th	8th	10th	12th	
Interview	5	4	4	4	5	5	**27**
Focus	7	9	6	6	6	4	**38**
Grand total							**68**

These schools represent urban and suburban schools that reflect the ethnic diversity found in San Francisco Bay Area, African American, Latino, Asian and Caucasian. Although the number of girls and boys were about equal for the whole study, it was noted that at the middle school more girls were interested in doing the study than boys. Table 2 outlines the breakdown of student participants.

The Academic Performance Index (API) has been included to give the reader an idea of the school environment from which pupils in this study attend. This has an obvious bearing on the results of this study. Students coming from schools showing low scores imply that these schools are not meeting the needs of their students.

The API is the centerpiece of the statewide accountability system in California public schools. The State Department of Education annually calculates API for each school in California and has a target score each year. Schools that meet or rise above the target score are eligible for rewards. Those that do not may be identified for the state intervention process called

Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program (IIUSP). The middle school used for this study is currently under IIUSP. Rankings are based solely on the Stanford 9 norm-referenced assessment that is administered in conjunction with the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program. The API is based on scores from 200-1000. Table 3 outlines the API results for 2000. Schools are ranked from 1-10 with 1 being the lowest and 10 the highest score. Each school was also compared to schools having similar demogrpahics and student population.

Figure 2
Participant Demographics

Ethnicity	# of Pupils
African American	6
Asian	5
Latino	8
Caucasian	7
Tongan	1
Boys	14
Girls	13

Figure 3
API Rankings (1 –10 with 1 the lowest)

School District	Base Score 200-1000	2000 API Rank	Similar School
Hayward	723	7	3
Oakland	370	1	1
San Mateo	717	8	6

Twenty-three students (85%) expect to go to college. Twenty-two students (81%) had a specific career in mind, with doctor being the most frequent. Twenty-five students perceive themselves as good students. Hear a few voices of the students that you will be reading about:

"I guess I'm a pretty good student. I get my work done. I'm organized. Pretty good grades. What else can I say"

"well, I think I'm doing great 'cause I don't be writing in the bathrooms like other people, and I don't be fighting at school. I try my best."

"I wouldn't describe myself as an excellent student but I would describe myself like an okay student. Even though my friends say that I'm smart, I don't think that I'm that smart, I'm just okay for my age."

"I get good grades but I'm kind of a slacker. I have always managed to work the system... I manage to do as little work as possible to that "A". I'm very proud of my skill in that, where I barely do any homework but I still keep up."

Student Selection

Each school had their own procedure for choosing student participants. At the elementary level, the principal asked for teacher volunteers in the appropriate grade level. One teacher at each grade level volunteered to participate. All students in each of these classes were given permission slips, which were coded with ethnicity, gender and academic abilities. Fifteen students who agreed to participate were chosen. Out of the fifteen, four to five from each grade level were interviewed individually and the rest of the students were part of a focus group.

At the middle school the same procedure was used except the researcher worked with the teachers directly instead of the principal. A sixth grade teacher and eighth grade teacher volunteered to participate. Students who returned their permission slips were randomly selected for gender, ethnic and academic diversity.

Based on academic heterogeneity and grade level, the high school principal chose a psychology and physical education class to participate in the study. Five of the students from grades 10 and 12 were chosen for the individual interviews and the rest were interviewed in focus groups. The assignment of students for individual and focus group interviews provided balance of gender, ethnicity and ability.

General Procedures

Permission was obtained from each school district as well as the principal and parents of participating students at each school. Parent permission slips were distributed to students and only those returning them were chosen for the study. To help them feel more at ease, the chosen students met with the researchers for a pizza party to help them get to know each other and to understand the study. Before all interviews, students were reminded of the purpose of the research, that they could stop the interview at any time and were asked permission to record the session. They had the right to reject any question they felt they did not want to answer. The interviews took place privately so students were able to speak freely without interference from teachers and peers. The interview questions took from 45-60 minutes depending on grade level and whether it was an individual or focus group. The same questions (see Appendix A) were asked in the individual and focus groups.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using AnSWR (Analysis for Word-Based Records) software obtained free on the internet through the Center for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov/hiv/software/answr.htm). This program was specifically written to analyze qualitative data. Student answers for each question were categorized and coded. The total for each category was printed out with specific student comments. If students made comments that came under two different categories it was coded separately. Sometimes, then, the number of comments might add up to more than the number of students. Some students never really answered the question and thus were not counted for a specific question. The qualitative analysis focused on the following research questions:

- What are the kinds of teaching activities described by students?
  What do teachers do to help them succeed academically?
- Do students like to be challenged? Why or why not?
- What do teachers do to help students learn?
- What are the positive factors in cooperative learning?
- What are the factors contributing to students feelings of success?

- Are students aware of caring adults in the school?
- What are students' perceptions about their decision-making role at the school?
- What are students' attitudes toward school rules?
- What are the factors that contribute to a student's sense of physical and emotional safety at school?
- What is the role of out-of-school activities that contribute to a students' sense of success and interest in school?

Results

Results are divided into two separate sections. The first discusses what students had to say about their academic achievements and experiences, and the second part relates to the resiliency factors that are experienced in school.

PART 1 – Academic Achievement and Experience

What does it mean to learn?

It was important for students to understand what it meant to learn before they could discuss their own learning. Although only 22 students (85%) of the 27 interviewed were able to answer the question, they did it with great clarity. Their definitions of what it means to learn were clustered into four categories, to remember, to comprehend, to acquire new information and to pay attention. Eleven students (41%) thought that when you remember it then you have learned it. Seven (26%) students realized that you are learning when you get new information. Five students (19%) recognized the fact that to learn something meant that you understand it, can explain it or apply it. Two students (7%) thought that if you were paying attention and were interested in what the teacher was teaching, you were learning. Let's hear a few of their definitions.

"To have the teacher tell me something you absorb it into your brain, you memorize-you remember that like long division. That was trouble for me in third grade, then after the end of the year ...and now it is a breeze for me. I'm really good with that now."

"Like somebody teaching you something and you remembering it. And you remember it for the rest of your life, so you've learned it."

"It means, someone says something and then you remember it and you know how to do it and then you can do it without anybody helping you 'cause someone taught you it and you know it."

" To *get smarter, to make your brain stronger, getting a little bit more knowledgeable."*

"*Find out something new about something you already knew, but then it's different."*

" I think being presented with information in an organized manner and kind of having it not just told to you once but really the whole concept being enforced, learn about its application, not just learn... and not just learn it and drop it but keep it throughout the year, always relate everything to each other."

" I'm learning, I'm interested in the subject, I would usually probably be sort of like this all the time, sort of [paying attention]. Yeah, looking at the teacher constantly, watching, going back and forth, really listen and I wouldn't be fidgeting."

Challenging Versus Easy Lessons

Students were asked whether they thought challenging or easy work helped them learn best. They had some interesting comments. Nineteen (70%) students specifically stated that having challenging work was more beneficial to their learning than easy work. These students felt that challenging work made them think and work harder thereby helping them understand, remember better and learn more. It was felt that when the work was too easy they lost interest, got bored and therefore did not pay attention to the teacher. Substantiating these ideas are the following student comments,

> *"Well, because if something's so easy for me I get bored easily."*
>
> *"Yeah. Cause if it's easy I'm not gonna learn anything and I really wouldn't be paying attention, so I don't know if I'd really be paying attention, really want to learn that."*
>
> *"Because I think it's easier to learn when you're challenged because if you want to learn it you will try to understand it or you'll get help to understand it. But if it's easy, it's whatever, you might just forget it or you understand it and you'll just forget about it later on."*
>
> *"Because I have to do more work (when challenging) to get it in my brain so I can keep it. Or else if I just like do it in school and I'm like half sleeping, it goes in my head and comes out the other."*

One student specifically stated that it felt good to go home after learning something new. Another aptly stated that when teachers just give you the answers, *"...it doesn't help you learn and then when we go to high school we're not gonna know nothing."* Two students who said that they didn't like to do work that was too hard admitted that when they are challenged they learned more and when it was easy they just looked up a simple answer and promptly forgot it.

How teachers and students know when a student is learning

It was important to understand from students' perspectives how teachers knew, when as a result of their teaching, the student has learned. Also important was how the student knew when s/he had learned. Students and teachers shared three strategies for assessing learning: tests/quizzes, student performance and grades. Almost half of the students (Eleven, 41%) thought that teachers knew what they knew because they gave tests and quizzes. Contrasted by, five students who felt tests and quizzes were important information about their learning.

On student performance, five students (19%) said that their general performance in the classroom helped the teacher see how well they were doing. These students thought that if they were actively engaged in a lesson and the teacher saw them, then the teacher must have known they were learning. Teachers check their work to see if they did their work correctly. Students seemed to think that their performance was most important to help them know when they were learning. Eleven students (41%) felt that they knew they learned something when they could easily complete their assignments in class or for homework.

Given the use of grades in schools, it was surprising to us that only two students commented that teachers used grades to know when they learned something. Two students mentioned that the only way they knew if they learned was through their grades. If they got good grades then they must have known what they were doing

Hear student voices.

" She would give us a quiz at the end of the week. And whoever knew how to do it, she would like keep on-she would go to the next step, but whoever didn't know how to do it, she would like work ...with them."

"It's better now. I think most of you have learned it now."

"Because he saw me going through it and knowing how to do it and he saw my paper..."

"Yeah because they see that eventually you stop raising your hand. You're getting through all your work. You're not skipping problems ' cause you don't understand it...If you have to show your work they can see that you learned..."

"...and he'll explain that to us and you'll like, oh so that's [it]– I think that's the big sign that the teacher knows you're learning."

"Cause he's like sees that we're doing it and if we're having fun and if we're getting it."

"Because I was getting most of 'em right ...and to see if I do it right, and if his answer and my answer are the same, then I figure that I've figured out how to do the certain equation, or whatever. ...Now I can do it faster."

" I don't struggle with the answer. I know it right away. I recognize it and it's something that always stays with me...so if you ask me a question, I could probably go into lots of details about it."

"...and if did learn something I probably would usually get good grades from the subject if I was really learning."– they made a test from the district, and I got a good grade on it and I think I know all of it."

Students identified questions and body language as two areas that help teachers know that they were learning. Six students (22%) believed that teachers used questions to determine if they were learning. These students felt that when they stopped raising their hands to ask a question or when the teacher asked them a question and they knew the answer, then the teacher knew that they understood what they were accomplishing. Some students realized that they could inform the teacher by asking the teacher a question themselves. Hear their voices.

"We would raise our hands and say we didn't get it..." or by saying, " Because I asked her, I'm not sure I understand this problem, and she's like you just have to remember what the imaginary number is..."

"Because she asks us question about what she's teaching, like we have notebooks that we put our stuff into, and she walks around and checks them and then she like reads...and she says okay, and if she sees that a lot of people didn't understand it, like the wasn't right, she stands there for a little while and give out the way it should have been..."

"He asked questions about it. He just wanted to make sure do we understand it, so he asked questions about the pizza and fractions."

"He came around to the group and asked them if they were learning it and if they were getting it down..."

"...but she would know if I was understanding it or not if she went to ask me how I go to that solution, then she'd probably know whether or not I understand it. Or if I ask a question that might show that I don't understand it completely."

When a teacher gave a group of students a choice of questions to answer, a student said the following. *"Get a few easy and get a few hard, and I guess because there's some harder ones, that would let him know, if we can't do those, if we picked most of the easy ones, then he would know that we're not getting it."*

These three (11%) very insightful students recognized that teachers could look beyond tests and homework and look at their body language to determine if they were learning.

"I think your teacher knows when everyone is awake. That's a good sign. 'Cause once everyone starts dozing off you know that you're lecturing too much. And when people are getting involved with questions that's the big one-people are really asking questions 'cause asking questions takes your learning to the next level. You're taking what you are learning and you're applying it to a different concept and you're asking that question."

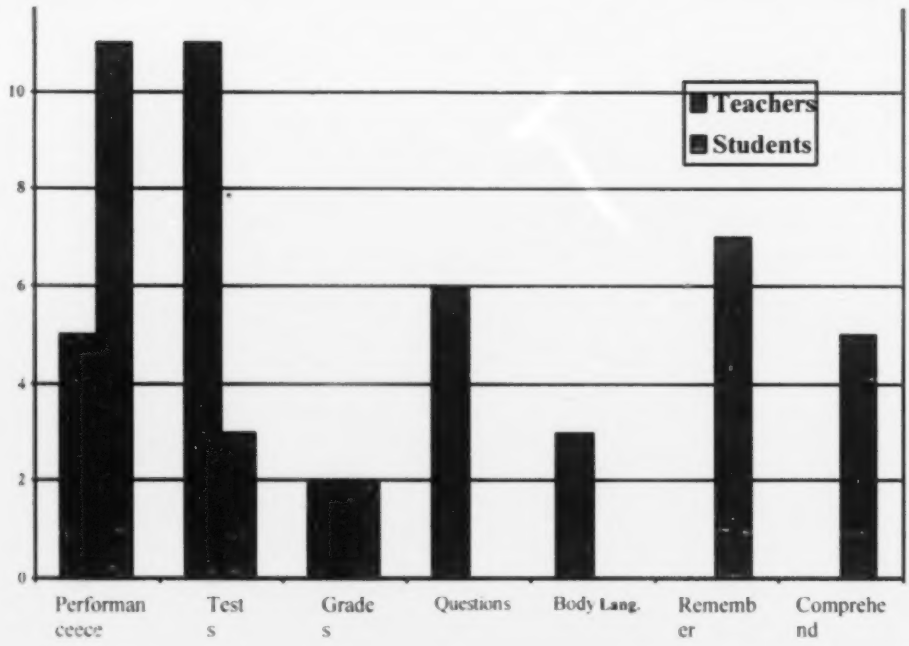
"Usually they can tell. If your head is down you're probably not. If you're head is up and you're looking around, maybe not, but if you're obviously paying attention, then yeah."

"...my teacher would come to me and he would explain to me, and I'd probably have this face like I still probably don't understand, so he asks me, do I understand it, I'm like no, so he would go over it until I finally go it."

Students identified remembering and comprehending as additional ways that they knew when they were learning. Seven students (26 %) mentioned that when they remember something they know they have learned it. Five students (19 %) stated that comprehending information was their measure of learning. These students were clear that before they could learn something they had to understand the concept. Hear their voices.

"I recognize it and it's something that-it always stays with me, I can never forget something when I learn it. So like if you ask me a question, I could probably go into lots of details about it."

"Because when I go out of class, I can remember what she was teaching. And when I go home, it it's something that really interested me, like something really attracted my attention...like we start talking and we go oh, we did this, and I remember all this stuff that they taught us..."



How Teachers and Students Know When a Student is Learning
Figure 4

"...I could comprehend what he was saying. If he said something wrong, I would be on the ball and be like, excuse me, I don't understand that. If I was learning I would be sitting there constantly reviewing what he has told me in my mind."

"...test to see if f do it right, and if his answer and my answer are the same, then I figure that I've figured out how to do the certain equation..."

How teachers helped students learn

Several questions were asked to understand what helps students to learn, both what their teacher does and what they do to promote learning. Three strategies emerged as the most often used by teachers: Explain things, monitor learning, and ask questions.

One student's comment was unique and very powerful, she said, *"I think you'd have to make it interesting, but you can't go too far by replacing the substance of – just for fun, because some teachers go too far and you replace what you're supposed to be learning with just something interesting."*

Another student said, "you gotta learn – if you don't pay attention you won't learn anything. Like, you won't hardly get a job. You'll be in the street like people in downtown Oakland ..so if you don't learn, it's your fault."

Explain things

Interesting, but not surprising, students mostly mentioned that teachers explained things to them to help them learn (20 students, 74%). Under this category teachers either lectured to the whole class, helped students individually, gave examples, or provided step-by-step instruction. Math was mentioned most often, especially when students mentioned a step-by-step process that helped them learn. They thought that it helped when teachers explained things more than once.

There was one comment that was not positive but it is a meaningful one to relate the importance of going into depth when explaining a concept. This student said, *"I don't really get this stuff that the teacher teach me 'cause they do it very briefly."* Other student voices are as follows.

> *"She's really good at what she's explaining, because mostly we understand everything she explains to us. People don't ask that many questions, because I guess she has everything already planned out. And she's pretty good at explaining everything that we're gonna do, so when we have to do labs and stuff, I understand pretty much what we have to do even though it sounds complicated."*
>
> *"...when they talk out loud and stuff. Like if they explain about the assignment that they give to me. Like telling us how to get it done and stuff."*
>
> *"Well if everybody finished, he'll go up and check it and tell us if we got it wrong. If we got it wrong he'll explain it again."*
>
> *"To help us learn she would – if you're not getting this one thing, she'd take you to the side and help you out with that one...after that year, everything she wanted you to know you knew..."*
>
> *"Okay, well, he does the steps first ' cause he writes the steps on the board, and he makes you write 'em down.... if you don't division, he can help you a lot."*
>
> *"Everybody was writing down the steps so they could get it."*
>
> *"No, she was giving notes how to start it, how to do it, the problems."*
>
> *"She always does examples, but she does a lot of examples. She's always willing to give us more examples. Or she'll do like one on one help if you need it."*
>
> "*Notetaking is very helpful. The teacher writes notes on overhead, explains them, and ties it to what we have learned. This helps us to take our own notes so we can study later."*

One student had a very insightful observation that informs what teachers can do to help students learn to write.

> *"...If it's a story you like, then you're paying attention to it and now you're writing about it, you're not just writing isolated words or isolated letters or definitions, you're actually writing a story."*

Monitor learning

Answers for this category were powerful (7 students, 26%). Some students felt that they liked it when the teacher monitored because they didn't have to raise their hand so that everybody in class could hear their question. Another thought that when a teacher just sits at his/her desk, student questions were not always answered and therefore, they didn't learn what they were supposed to for that day. Hear their voices.

> *"Well at first he was sitting at this desk reading something, waiting for us to get settled in. And as we were working, he was walking around to each group."*

"Well, I like where if they're sitting or if they're just walking around, I don't really like if we have to raise our hand while they're like doing stuff, because then we have to talk out loud and then everybody else hears it. It probably disturbs."
"...he doesn't have to go around and ask every kid if they know what they're doing. He can just go to each group and ask the group if they know what they are doing, and if they don't, he can explain it to them."

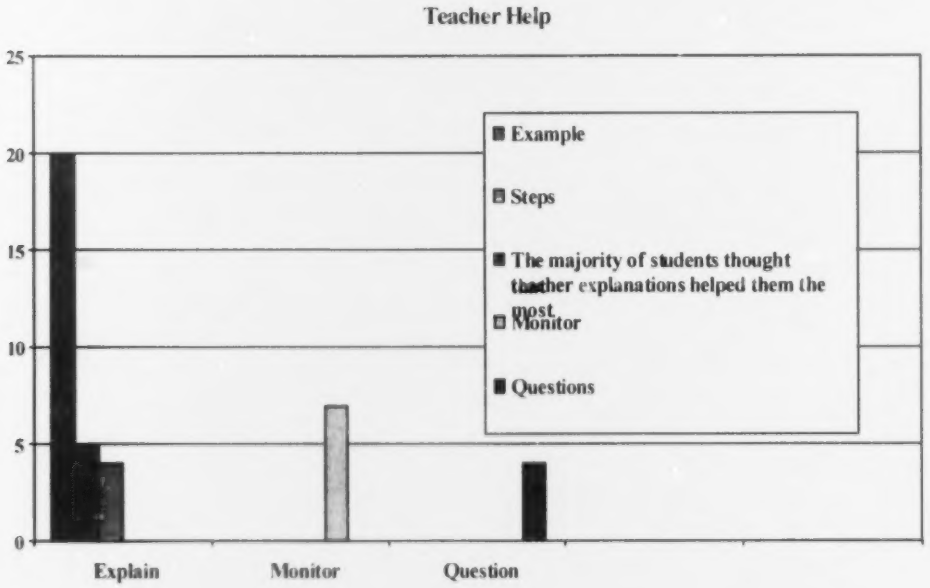
Questions

Four students (15%) thought teacher questions were very important to help them learn. One student stated that it was degrading for a teacher to ask a question that was so simple that everyone knew the answer. This student would not answer such a question but would when their opinion was sought.

"I think it has a lot to do with the actual question. If it's a simple fact they want you to respond, it's kind of degrading. Like everyone in the class knows the answer and the teacher is kind of condescending. I think, like in other classes the teacher wants an opinion from you. Which is completely different, or like ants to know what you think about something. Then I'll be willing to answer if it's like sharing my thought with the class or hearing other people's thoughts. But when a teacher just wants to know like some random piece of information, won't do it."

Student perceptions of how the teacher helped them learn.

Figure 5



Group Learning

We asked a question to understand whether students learn better alone within a whole class or in small groups. They did not discuss it in terms of being a way teachers helped them learn thus a direct question to determine or cooperative learning. Students were also prompted to find out if they experienced group work. So, the responses we report are for learning in a group. Out of the 27 students interviewed, 21 (78%) of them had positive comments (sometimes mixed with the good and the bad) regarding group learning as a viable way to learn. When asked why they liked it, 17 commented (81%) that they liked it because they could get help when they didn't understand something. These students felt that the teacher couldn't always get around to them for help but when they work in a group, there was always someone available to help them or to share new ideas with. One of the most powerful comments came from a shy student who felt that he could talk better in small groups, others thought that student explanations were easier to understand. Two students specifically stated that it helped to be with others because sometimes other students had said things in such a way that they were able to look at a topic in a differently. Another student stated, *"...it (concept) gets into your mind (better)* "Hear their voices.

> *"It's easier. Because-usually in each group there's a person that's shy and I'm the shy one most of the time. So I don't like to talk a lot. So-like in front of big groups (whole class), so I kind of shut myself out and there's a lot of people (small groups) that can help me."*

> *"Yes, I think it's more helpful to work in a group 'cause each person has different skills and they could help each other better than one person."*

> *"Well, considering that there's a lot of kids in each class, you really don't have an opportunity in class to ask the teacher questions and understand something and hopefully if you're in a group, one of the four people, or one of the three people, will the answer."*

> *"Yeah, some of them, like if they knew better than me they would help me, or if I knew better I would help them."*

Students felt that student help could be more effective:

> *"Sometimes they (the student) tell it from their point of view."*

> *"If you work on something in a group, another person will-at least one person who will come up with something you never thought of. Or they might interpret something a whole other way."*

Many students had mixed views. They liked group learning but thought that it was slower. It took more time because there would be a lot of arguing and the discussions were longer because everyone had an opportunity to talk. Even so, one student thought he learned more. Another thought that he preferred working alone but admitted it can work.

> *"But I think group discussions are really valuable when they stay on the topic."*

> *"Yeah, I have. I had good experiences in groups and stuff, but I talk a lot when I'm in groups and don't be thinking about doing the work."*

Seven students (26%) clearly did not like group learning. These students thought that there was too much waste of time through student arguing, talking about things not related to the task, being dragged down by those who didn't understand or by those who didn't cooperate. It was difficult for two students to concentrate in a group and they really preferred working alone. Others mentioned how distracting learning in a group was. This student's comment sums up what many of these students said:

> *"The problem with being in a group is sometimes the groups aren't as good as they should be and you get like these problem people talking, and it really distracts everyone else from their learning. Something else bad with the group is that one person could be slacking off, being lazy, kind of copying from other people."*

> *"...everyone has different ideas, and you don't know which way to go so you're stuck on all those things for a while until you can actually get together and set things right. So it takes a while sometimes to work in groups."*

It seemed that who was in the group was important. The number of students who preferred working with friends was about equal to those who didn't want to work with their friends. If they were with people they didn't like, nothing got done. Others thought that working with new people made them work harder so they could look good in front of them. Still another thought that working with friends made them more comfortable and it allowed them to participate more fully by speaking up. Here's what they said:

> *"Well because you're more-closer to this person, you're their friends, and it makes it easier for me to work better."*

> *"I like doing group work. It's just sometimes I don't get along with the classmates because always get the same group, sometimes people don't learn, or I'm not friends with."*

> *"I like the one where he picks people because he knows who's having trouble since he's the teacher and he knows what-we were writing papers and stuff so he knows which person has trouble with this."*

> *"Yeah, sometimes it works out better when the teacher puts you in a group, but sometimes you can be put in a bad group, like, where just your whole group is just not doing anything.*

Only one student describes how the teacher taught them how to work in groups. Students are given talking cards and when they hold theirs up everyone has to listen and cannot talk.

> *"Well, in our groups. 'Cause we have table groups, and Mr. Cruz has talking cards, so we talk one at a time, put our card down and then we talk. Then another person puts their card down and talks."*

PART 2 - Student Voice about their experience with factors of resiliency

This section of the study addressed factors of resiliency to identify what experience students have that helps them to thrive and bounce back from adversity. Four factors emerged as themes of their responses, caring adult/close/support/connectedness, high expectations, clear and consistent boundaries, and leadership opportunities/meaningful participation/sharing of responsibilities/service to others.

Caring adult, close bond, support and connectedness

This resiliency factor is listed in the literature as one of the most effective to mitigating risk factors. Twenty-five (93%) students in the study have an adult that cares about them. The focus of this question was to identify a caring adult at the school with whom the student had developed a close bond. Ten (37%) students identified a teacher and three identified a mentor. The fact that these adults "help them" was cited as the most prominent reason that they knew they cared. Hear these student voices:

> *"If they go out of their way to help you, just not answer you question, but help you on more than just your question, then you can tell that they want you to succeed also. They just help you expand on what you know, help you move it along and make it easier for you."*
>
> *"They help me with anything that I need. They really understand me."*
>
> *"If I do something wrong, he may give me time to fix, or he may explain it to me. He doesn't always get mad. If he gets mad, you can tell it's not really like he's really really mad for you forever."*
>
> *"They help me learn things I never knew."*

One student was rather philosophical in is perception of the role of teachers.

> *"I know all the teachers do care about their students a lot. They can't really show it though cause they're teachers and they're supposed to be there just to teach us. I know a lot of teachers do care for their students though."*

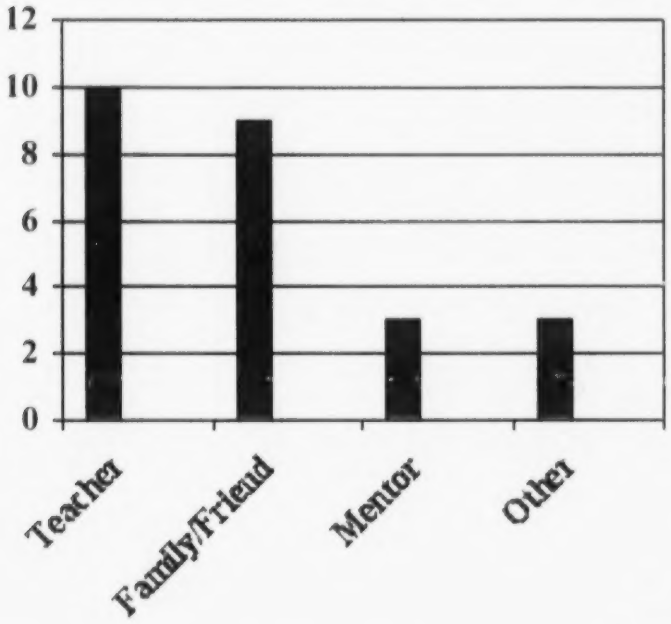
A student of color felt that she felt less racially isolated because of the Polynesian club on campus. The sponsor of the club was a caring adult in her life. As such this person comes to student houses, talks to parents, helps get parents involved, checks on their grades every two weeks and is generally very demanding.

Another student expressed his sadness at the loss of her "caring teacher" and described a behavior that is all too familiar.

> *"Because they talk to me. Miss. _____ comes to school and taught me to relax - we eat potato chips, drink soda, see if we can relax. But when she left I was mad. The next day when I woke up I was crying that I didn't want to come to school, my mom said I have to, and then I did, I wanted to go home, so I just stayed in my classroom and put my jacket over my head."*

Figure 6

Nine (33%) students identified a family friend or relative as that caring adult (sister, godmother, aunt, uncle, grandfather) and had to be prompted to identify an adult at school.



"I just consider my parents to be like number one."

"One of my aunts. I have a little sister, my mom doesn't favor her but she pays more attention to her. She thinks that if you don't give full attention to your daughter she's gonna make her go wild and stuff. So my aunt is there for me."

"If something happens in our family that brings the whole family down, they're (family friends) always there to try and cheer us up. They're there to cheer us up and stuff, or if we need them, they're there for us. For awhile, my mom, she went through some financial problems, so a lot of our really close friends to the family would help us out just pay us back whenever you can."

High expectations

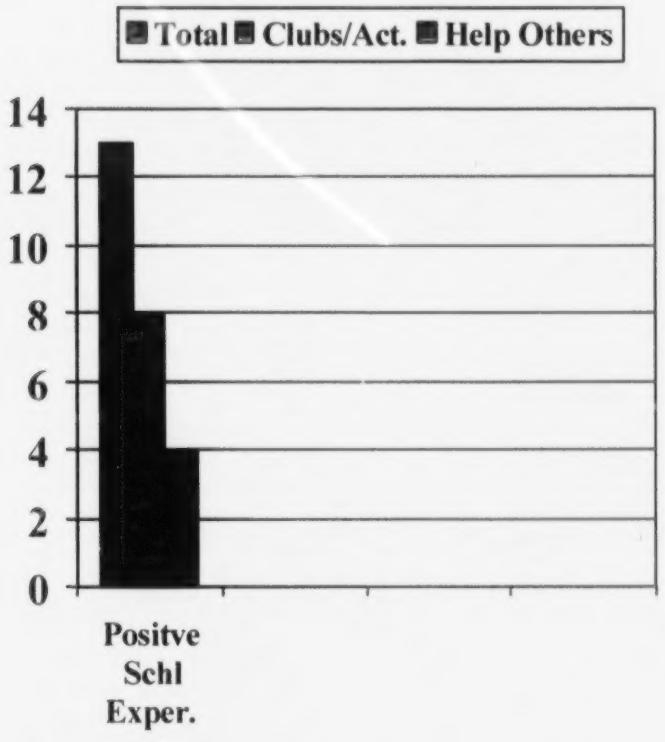
Determining the factors that contribute to student's feeling of success and when they feel most encouraged and confident was a rich source of information. Twenty-two (81%) students expressed specific times at school when they felt successful. Twenty-three students (85%) expect to go to college. Twenty students (74%) had a specific career in mind, with doctor being the most frequent. Through these feelings, students were demonstrating high expectations for themselves. A couple of students expressed a deep feeling of success and its benefit to them.

"We don't do much activity like in school but we just have to like be successful and think like it's for us, it's for our own good so we need to help ourselves."

"I just feel excited with myself, happy at myself cause I feel strong, like I could do anything."

"We don't do much activity like in school but we just have to like be successful and think like it's for us, it's for our own good so we need to help ourselves."

Figure 7 -



What Made Students Feel Successful

Fifteen students reported that their feelings of success are associated with their learning and accomplishing things. Hear some of their voices.

> *"Well, when I learn, 'cause I like to learn. I want to learn I don't want to be stupid when I grow up. I just want to learn because if you don't learn, you can be so stupid that you go to jail and stuff and I don't want to do that."*

> *"...I guess when I know I'm doing well or doing all my homework and stuff, on time, because I know me, I have the biggest procrastination problem ever. So I guess just when I do what I need to do. I guess 'cause I just feel like I'm accomplishing something, getting somewhere in life sort of."*

> *"When I see that I am getting my work done. I'm getting my work done and I'm still able to have a social life and go out with my friends."*

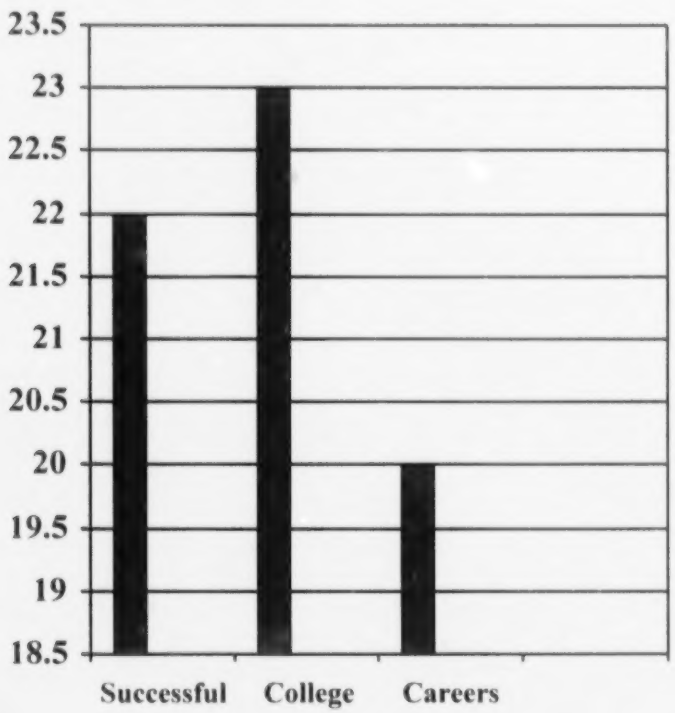
As educators we were concerned about the fifteen students that viewed grades as the source of their feeling of success. Several voices about grades expressed the hoped for benefit of the use of grades, as a motivator, encouragement, information for improvement, as proof of learning. Hear their voices:

> *"Like I do good on a test or just get an A and I think if I study a lot I'll get A's. It's like the same when I get a bad grade I say I can do better next time. It encourages me to concentrate on what I got a bad grade on."*

High Expectations

The majority of Students are clear about going to college and had set careers in mind

Figure 8



"Maybe the grades that you get out of a project or an assignment that you do and you get a really high grade. That helps you lift up your morale. Okay, if I did good in this one, I can do better over here, so that kinda makes you feel good about doing work."

"When I get good grades it make me feel like I learned something."

"When I ace a paper, like in English, it's really hard to get an A in that class and I was actually surprised that I got the highest grade in that class last quarter, having honor students in there."

"Let's say I get a good grade, I'm just happy about it. So usually I'll be happy for longer and then I'll just be in the mood to do work and get better grades"

"When I get good grades and when I help somebody on it, like on a worksheet or something, I could help somebody on it cause my job in the class is to be an explainer, and explainers know what's going on, and so there's four of 'em. So whenever anybody ever needs help, they just come to us and then we tell them."

"When I see my grades going up. Then I know I'm pushing myself harder, accomplishing goals and stuff. You're able to get up there so that way you know that in the future you'll have a better future."

One student shared our ambivalence about grades, when he expressed that grades helped him feel most successful,

"Its kind of superficial, but the grades. Its nice when you come home and you feel like you really learned something. I got an "A" on this test. I got an "A" on the report card and then you feel really like you've accomplished it...my teacher knows I learned this. My parent knows I've learned this. I learned this concept...I got an "A" in calculus I didn't learn anything...but I was happy with that "A." It's bad to say but it's true – the grades."

Clear consistent boundaries

Several interview questions attempted to identify the experiences and feelings of students that helped them to feel physically and emotionally safe at school that makes them feel good about being at their school. Sixteen students (59%) indicated that they are being treated fairly at school. Many came to this impression by observing that students were treated the same as other students and are being treated with respect by teachers. Hear their voices:

"They don't disrespect me and if like if I treat them respectfully, they can treat me the same way. That's fairly, but if I treat them disrespectful and they treat me badly, that's not fair.

"I'll be with people, we'll get treated equally, and teachers, they treat us like adults.

"Yeah. Everybody's treated the same way. I haven't really seen anybody that's done more for one person than for another one.

"Because everybody's equal. Like nobody's getting more attention than anybody else. I'm not treated unfairly because I'm Indian."

"They don't like - like when I do something bad, they don't like brag on it, like when I come late they don't cap on you."

"Although some students felt that they were treated fairly, they did observe that other students were not and they had specific ideas as to why the difference in treatment.

"I don't - you don't see anyone get any type of special treatment or anything - well, I've heard about teachers giving other people different grades or whatever, because the teacher doesn't like them or something. But I don't feel any particular different treatment because I'm African American or because I'm a boy."

"Well, I get plenty of attention from the teachers, and if you ask them a question and they just ignore you, then it's because they don't care about you. They don't like you, and other students will say they are being treated fairly, the teacher pays attention to them and they don't pay attention to you, you're obviously not being treated fairly."

"Well, in all our classes, there's always been the teacher's pet. There's always been a kid that you can always tell the teacher likes him the most, but can't tell yet with Mr. ____, but all my other teachers you could tell, even if they're really good teachers you can just tell that they like them the most and stuff. I guess I'm treated fairly, but it's just that the kids that always are getting A's, the teachers seem to like them the most and stuff."

One student commented about his fair treatment by teachers and unfair treatment by students, citing a very familiar behavior.

> *"Well, to teachers, I think they treat me fairly, but some of the students they don't treat me fairly because like when you get in line you have to like just get in line and wait, but most students just come in and cut and they push and stuff like that."*

Nine (33%) students felt that they (and other students) are NOT treated fairly, and in some cases the experience is structural to the system. Two students described treated along racial lines, for example, *"we are not all treated the same, when a black or Brown student does something the adults are quick to respond and to punish. But when a white student does something similarly nothing is done."* In other cases, students described treatment based upon academic performance or reputation. Hear their voices:

> *"I'd say no, but not in a positive way. I think it's the opposite. Just 'cause our school also has a two-layered system, and if you're in the top, it's not fair, you're getting the better treatment than people are on the bottom. Not to say bottom but like - so I don't think it's fair."*

> *They should fix the whole school, put new bathrooms, supplies for the bathroom. They lock the doors and don't let us go in. That's unfair."*

> *"At class sometimes, like I'm doing my work and they confuse me with another person that's talking because they're not really paying attention to who is talking and who's - and then they punish me for something that I didn't do. And you can't argue with them. You can't say, I didn't do anything because they have (not clear). When I get good grades I think I'm treated fairly because I do my work and I do my homework and get good grades on my tests."*

> *"Some people get treated fairly and some people don't. There's some people that act bad and, then after a while they just stop doing it and people still treat them as if something happened. Like if a person does something, but the bad person that's stopped being bad, didn't do it, they would blame the person that was bad, just because of his background."*

Figure 9

Treated Fairly	Treated Unfairly
16	9

Leadership opportunities, meaningful participation, sharing of responsibility, service to others

Thirteen students (48%) feel that there is something good happening at their school that makes them feel good about being there. Eight of these students identified participation in clubs and activities as being their most positive experience. Four students derived pleasure from helping others. Hear their voices:

> *"I know several of the clubs do outreach in the community, like the one club is doing a senior citizens thing and other clubs reach out to other students to help them with homework and stuff. Just to know there's people that - there's kind hearted people that are going to this school that aren't just looking out for themselves or are only just caring about themselves but are looking out for others as well."*

"I finally found something to do, like at recess time. I never knew before to go to the library to help. I used to waste my recess sitting there in the classroom, I didn't like playing foursquare or basketball. I stink, its just embarrassing trying it."

"They have special days, crazy hair day, pajama day. Even if I don't do them it's fun to see other people and what they do and how creative they look."

Twenty students (81%) reported that outside activities help them feel successful. Sports (6 students) were the most often mentioned, but only slightly more than after school learning activities (5 students). Four students feel more successful when they are helping others. Hear their voices:

"I would help one of the students in the school, elementary schools. I would go after school and I would help them with their homework and talk to them I felt good because I was actually teaching somebody younger than me."

"...I feel pretty good when I have to help my cousins and I know I can, I understand what they're doing and I help them and then like there's some things that I do that no one else can do so that makes mew feel good."

"Sometimes I'm at a friends house and his brother is doing homework and its something I know and I help him out, then I feel I've learned it and I've succeeded in learning it."

Two students work after school and it is a source of their feeling of success. One student sees his success has a benefit to him when he goes to college.

"I've been able to hold a job and if they like you and you're a hard worker they'll always have a position for you if you need it. They've told me that they want me to stay throughout high school and go to college."

Figure 10

Advice to Teachers

Give personal help	6
Interesting activities	6
Explain clearly	5
Show examples	5
Remember what it's like to be a teen	3
Give encouragement	2
Teach favorite subject/What I'm interested in	2
Don't push too hard	1
Do group work	1
Relevance	1

Hear their voices of advice.

"Maybe like we could go outside and we can try, like if we're talking about how they can do something, maybe we can go outside and try it. Or we could like, maybe try to build one of them or something."

"What would help me learn? When they talk to me personally and tell me how to do something. 'Cause I don't like getting embarrassed. Like if I don't know how to do it, and he doesn't talk to me personally, and it is in front of the class, I get embarrassed. So I go up to his desk and I say I don't understand and then I go back to my desk and he talks to me there. And I still don't feel comfortable because we have groups of four, and still three people can hear and sometimes the other group in front of me or behind me can listen too."

"One piece of advice. Just application. I think that's the big one. Don't just teach the concept. Teach how it's used in the real world, teach why it's important. Why am I being taught this? I'm sitting there like, who cares. If its history, there's reasons why we learn history, and I like to know, how have things changed maybe because of this war. How is this affecting us right now and in the future. I think that's the big one for me. And learning math, where am I going to use this division later in life, where am I going to use this calculus especially? I felt that this was the biggest waste of my year, calculus, I was never going to use this stuff again. I don't remember anything from that class, it was a really bad year. I got an A, but I didn't even pass the AP exam. It was my teachers first year of teaching calculus. He would be asking us questions, we'd correct him. That's not right because the calculus teacher had a baby so we got a new one. A big percentage of our class failed the AP. Only the ones with private tutors who paid a fortune were the ones that didn't fail. It was just a waste of my time."

"More group work but not too much. We do group work and I'm like okay this is cool, it's over, we're done. But I go to another class and more group work. I just want to be alone and have nobody say anything to me just to see if I could actually do something for myself."

"I guess encourage them [students]. Encouragement would probably help. Telling someone you're there for them or something. You'll help them out they need help."

"Feel better is like trust us."

"Like more hands on activities because that's what helps you learn..."

Conclusions, Summaries and Recommendations

The need to improve schools for all students is of critical importance. Educators and other adults have been struggling with this challenge, but rarely does their struggle include students. This study focused on that missing piece. Early in the study it was clear that students had a lot to say and most importantly they wanted the opportunity to be heard. The findings reinforce much of what we already know about good practice and suspect about students' experiences. Most prominent among them is students need to connect with a caring adult, the benefit of personal attention with clear explanations and interesting activities, their awareness of fair treatment and their feelings of success.

This study is a beginning, increasing the number of voices and a deeper understanding of their experiences will provide richer knowledge and understanding. For example, since students find groupwork useful to their learning, what do teachers and students do, and according to Cohen, is the curriculum intellectually demanding? Further, although the schools participating in this study had a wide range of API rankings, analysis of the data did not determine the factors that might be different and thus influence this difference. Do students in high performing

schools describe different things that work for them than students in low performing schools? Further study might include very focused questions and analysis of data to inform this question.

Here is a summary of our student voices.

1. Students are aware and able to articulate (share their voice) their insights about the teaching and learning process. The majority of students (41%) thought that to remember something was the best way to define "to learn". They particularly saw that when they remembered for a long time and could, "just do it" they must have learned. In addition when they could comprehend (41%) acquire new information (26%) and when they paid attention (7%) they were also learning.

2. Students and teachers shared three strategies for assessing learning: tests/quizzes, student performance and grades. Almost half of the students (Eleven, 41%) thought that teachers knew what they knew because they gave tests and quizzes. Contrasted by, five students who felt tests and quizzes were important information about their learning.

3. Grades were only mentioned by two students (.07%) who felt teachers assessed their learning by looking at their grades as well as two students who thought that they used grades to help themselves determine how much they have learned. One might have predicted that more students would have mentioned grades as being the most important.

4. On student performance, five students (19%) said that their general performance in the classroom helped the teacher see how well they were doing. These students thought that if they were actively engaged in a lesson and the teacher saw them, then the teacher must have known they were learning. Teachers also check their work to see if they did their work correctly. However, eleven students (41%) seemed to think that their performance was most important to help them know when they were learning. These voices expressed that when they didn't have to ask the teacher a question, and were able to finish their work and, especially do it with ease, then they thought they must be learning.

5. Other ways students thought that teachers knew when they were learning included questions (22%) and body language(11%). In these categories, students felt that when they stopped raising their hands to ask a question or when the teacher asked them a question and they knew the answer, then the teacher knew that they understood their assignment. Some students realized that they could inform the teacher by asking the teacher a question themselves indicating when they didn't understand something. Some teachers could read expressions on their face designating a student's confusion or delight with work in progress.

6. Students identified remembering (26%) and comprehending (19%) as other factors which helped inform them of their learning. . These students were clear that they had to remember information, comprehend it and in some cases, apply it, before they could say that they learned something.

7. Students think they learn best when the teacher challenges them, models using a step-by-step process and explains assignments and concepts clearly. They appreciated teachers who made them think and find out things for themselves rather than just telling them the answers. When the work is too easy students thought they didn't remember the material and paid little attention to what was going on in class.

8. Students prefer group learning than learning alone in a full class. They found this to be most useful because they could discuss things with each other and that helped them to remember. It also helped them to get their questions answered faster than they could from their busy teacher. It was also clear to us that rarely were teachers using formal methods of groupwork, like complex instruction or even cooperative learning. For the students that did not like groupwork, the formal strategies by well trained teachers might address the concerns they expressed and increase student achievement.

9. Too many students could not identify adults at the school that cared about them. When they could (37%), it was a single teacher. Knowing their name and asking about them personally were the strongest indicators that the teacher cared for them. These results seemed to have no barrier to age, ethnicity, race or academic achievement. The pleasing result was that 93% of the students have an adult in their life that cares about them, with 33% reporting a family member. All students basically mentioned the same motivators for learning.

10. Most students (85%) in the study feel successful in school, have college in their plans and have a specific career in mind. Fewer student (48%) could identify specific things happening at school that helps them feel good about being ion the school. Helping others was an important example of that good and feeling successful.

11. The perception of fairness is an important source of emotional safety, with 59% of them feeling that things are fair. Unfortunately, 33% of the students did not feel that they or others were treated fairly, with the cause being racial discrimination.

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APPENDIX A

CHILDREN'S VOICES
Interview Questions
September 1999

1.	DEMOGRAPHICS

Name
Age
Year in School
Gender
Ethnicity
Years at school

1. Tell me about your school (name the school).

2.	PROFILE

1. How would you describe yourself as a student?
2. *Are you planning on going to college?
3. *What career are you thinking of (what do you want to be when you grow up?)

3.	EFFECTIVE LEARNING AND TEACHING (ACADEMIC)

1. Think of a lesson at school in which you learned something.
2. What do you think it means to learn?
3. Tell me what you learned from this lesson.
4. What materials were you using that were helpful to your learning?
5. How did you know when you were learning?
6. Was this lesson challenging or easy for you?
7. Were you working alone or with other students?
8. How did your teacher help you learn this?
9. Do you think your teacher knew you were learning?
10. How do you know?
11. If you had one piece of advice to give to your teachers about what helps you learn the best, what would you say?

4.	EMOTIONAL

1. When do you feel successful at school? What has caused you to feel that? way?
2. Can you think of a caring adult other than a parent? Who is that person? 3. How do you know they care for you? What do they do or say to make you feel special?
4. Is there any adult in your school or community who is special to you? Someone you think cares for you? If so, what makes this person special to you? Who is this person?
5. Is there something good happening at this school that makes you feel good about being at this school? If not, what do you think should happen that would make you happier being there.
6. What are you doing when you feel the most encouraged and confident at school?

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7. What goes on in school that contributes to your feeling successful?
8. Do you give up and become discouraged when you fail at something? What do you do to make yourself feel better?
9. A school has a lot of rules of how people should behave and get along. Can you name a couple of rules that you feel are important that help keep you safe and help you learn?
10. Does your school have rules that you feel are ones that help you feel safe?
11. Do you feel that you are being treated fairly at this school?
12. When you feel you are being treated fairly, what is happening to make you feel this way?
13. Do you help make any decisions for your school? What kind of decisions do you help make? What others kinds of decisions would you like to make. How does it make you feel when you get to do this?
14. Do you feel successful outside of school?
15. What is going on outside school that contributes to your feeling
16. If you had 1 piece of advice you would give to teachers to help you feel better about being in school, what would you say?